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LOVE'S BITTER-SWEET: TRANSLATIONS
FROM THE IRISH POETS OF THE SIX-
TEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTU-
RIES, BY ROBIN FLOWER.



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PREFACE

The originals of most of the poems here translated will be found in the collection of love poetry edited by Professor O'Rahilly under the title *Dánta Grádha*. A few of the poems at the end are translated from texts still in manuscript. An account of the origin and characteristics of this class of Irish poetry will be found in my introduction to Professor O'Rahilly's volume. It may be briefly said here that the evidence seems to prove that this kind of verse was introduced into Irish in the fourteenth century from the French, in all probability by Gerald the Rhymer, Fourth Earl of Desmond. The poems here translated are in the main of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries & correspond in time to the lyrics of the Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline poets in English. In their peculiar mingling of beauty and ironic wit they remind us in particular of the Cavalier poetry which drew much of its inspiration from John Donne, and some of the authors, for instance, Pierce Ferriter, were in the strict sense of the word Cavaliers, though with an Irish nuance. It is necessary to emphasise the fact that this poetry is in Irish the poetry of society, and I may be allowed to quote my own words on this point.

'The subject is love, and not the direct passion of

DISCARDED

the folk singers or the high vision of the great poets, but the learned and fantastic love of European tradition, the *amour courtois* which was first shaped into art for modern Europe in Provence, and found a home in all the languages of Christendom wherever a refined society and the practice of poetry met together. In Irish, too, it is clearly the poetry of society. To prove this, we need only point to the names of the authors of the poems; in Ireland, Gerald the Earl, Manus O'Donnell (the chief of his clan), the Earl of Glancare, and Pierce Ferriter; in Scotland, the Earl and Countess of Argyle and Duncan Campbell of Glenorquhy, 'the good knight', who died at Flodden. One is reminded of the company of noble poets, whose love poems are collected into *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557)—the Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder, and Lord Vaux. The other contributors to this anthology belong to a class which had no representative in England, the bardic order. They correspond in a way to the University men, but their fixed place in society was higher than any that his attainments alone have ever been able to secure for the University man in England. They were, indeed, until the fall of the old order an intellectual aristocracy, with all the privileges and, no doubt, many of the prejudices of a caste. They

held their position by virtue of their birth and the practice of their art. It is, thus, without any surprise that we find them sharing this peculiar art of love poetry with that other aristocracy of alien conquest or tribal right. And we shall probably not go very far wrong if we hold that just this poetry is the offspring of the marriage of these two orders. In this happy union the aristocrats of position contributed the subject, the aristocrats of art the style. By their intermediation the matter of European love poetry met the manner of Irish tradition. And in these poems we see how perfect was the fusion, how happy the result.'

In the translation it has seemed necessary to adopt the lyric manner of the European tradition, for the peculiar effect of the Irish manner with its interlacing rhymes and concise and balanced phrasing cannot be reproduced in any English which may hope to give the effect of poetry. With this premise the poems here following must be left to be their own apology.

Robin Flower.

TO
TOMAS O RATHILÉ
WITHOUT WHOSE INSPIRED
AND PATIENT SCHOLARSHIP
THIS BOOK HAD NEVER BEEN

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**LOVE'S BITTER-SWEET: POEMS
TRANSLATED FROM THE IRISH.
THE DISPRAISE OF ABSALOM**

Veiled in that light amazing,
Lady, your hair soft-waved
Has cast into dispraising
Absalom son of David.

Your golden locks close clinging,
Like birdflocks of strange seeming,
Silent with no sweet singing
Draw all men into dreaming.

That bright hair idly flowing
Over the keen eyes' brightness,
Like gold rings set with glowing
Jewels of crystal lightness.

Strange loveliness that lingers
From lands that hear the Siren:
No ring enclasps your fingers,
Gold rings your neck environ,

Gold chains of hair that cluster
Round the neck straight and slender,
Which to that shining muster
Yields in a sweet surrender.

THE BLACKTHORN BROOCH

No rustic blackthorn brooch should rest
Above the shining of that breast,
Were there, O red lips of sweet sound,
But one gold brooch all Eire round.

Of fiondrúine it should be made
The brooch that ties thy lovely plaid
Or marvellous pin of smithied gold,
Sweet singer!, in thy mantle's fold.

Thy cheek's pale amber claims as right
A fair pin in thy mantle bright
Of golden or of silvery hue,
O thou most loyal heart and true.

Blood of my heart! I'd set no pin
That many-coloured mantle in,
O mistress of all hearts!, but such
As showed the mastersmith's own touch.

DEATH AND THE LADY

Lovely lady, rein thy will.
Let my words a warning be,
Bid thy longing heart be still.
Wed no man. Remember me.

If my counsel like thee not,
Winsome beauty bright of blee,
Thou know'st not what deeds I've wrought.
Wed no man. Remember me.

If thou know'st not they are clay :
That slim form eyes may not see,
That round breast silk hides away,
Wed no man. Remember me.

Keep my counsel lest thou slip.
If love or hate men offer thee,
Hide thy heart and hoard thy lip.
Wed no man. Remember me.

Wed no man. Remember me.
I shall come thy joy to still
Though I shall not welcome be.
Lovely lady, rein thy will.

HAUNTED

Sweet lady, for thy honour's sake
Vex me no more, but let me be;
In life, in death, asleep, awake
Always I find no rest from thee.

A suppliant I with this one prayer:
Have pity nor beset me so
With that bright face and shining hair,
Where'er I stay, where'er I go.

Day and night I fly from thee,
But, whether long or short the way,
Those clustering locks, that step of glee
Follow me ever night and day.

O burning cheek! leave me to sleep,
Nor come in visions of the night
And when I wake thy distance keep
And leave my staggering wits upright.

It breaks my heart to tell thee so:
Let my enchanted eyes go free,
And when death comes to end my woe
Stand not between God's love and me.

Of all God's creatures loveliest thou,
A wand his own hand trained in grace;
I never killed a soul, I vow;
Yet hast thou slain me in this place.

Out on thee! Thou had'st little need,
For, wert thou spiritless as I,
O crystal glance! O comely reed!
I had not doomed thee thus to die.

What shall I do to save my mind
That withers at thy lips' fierce fire?
Ah! take my blessing and be kind
And give me rest from this desire.

There's many a man that longs for thee,
Thy breathing lips and flesh in bloom.
Then, my heart's darling!, leave me free,
Nor hunt me only to my doom.

WOMEN

Of women no more evil will I say,
The lightsome loves that help my heart to live
— The sun sees nothing sweeter on his way—
They pledge their faith and break it. I forgive,
All I forgive and scandal them no more.
I am their servant. Let the witless jeer.
Though their slain loves are numbered by the score,
I love them living and their ghosts are dear.
The cunning wits are loud in their dispraise,
And yet I know not. If their breed should fail,
What comfort were in all the world's wide ways?
A flowerless earth, a sea without a sail.

If these were gone that make earth Heaven for men,
Love them or hate, 'twere little matter then.

SPEECH IN SILENCE

Fie on last night that sped so swiftly by!
If I must hang, let me be hanged tonight.
Two in this house are speaking, eye to eye,
Though, lip with lip, they may not feed delight.
The jealous have no wit to interpose
In that eye-converse, whatsoe'er they do,
Our lips are silent and the watchers doze,
And eye to eye has passed the message true.
Dear, read my eyes across the jealous throng
There in your corner: 'Keep this night for me,
Curse on the loveless nights that do us wrong,
Shut out the morn, curtain the night with thee.'
Mary! slim queen of poets, hear my cry:
Fie on last night that sped so swiftly by!

LIGHT LOVE

Out of sight is out of mind,
Maids no loyal faith maintain;
Light love goes ranging and alway changing
Like a shifting April's sun and rain.

You were mine a year ago,
Love this year is fled away;
And that bright weather we knew together
Is clouded over since yesterday.

Ne'er a woman loves me now,
And my loving days are done;
That one should leave me it does not grieve me,
But women turn from me, every one!

MANUS O'DONNELL AND THE EARL'S DAUGHTER.

I

Lacking the heart she stole, what shall I do?
Most pitiful of all things born I live,
Reft of my soul though all men else have two.
Ah! could I but for one swift moment give
To the Earl's daughter, she that wrought my woe,
This heart and its immedicable grief,
Then in her secret bosom would she know
Love's sorrow; and how barren of relief
Drags the long year; and with what fell disease
The sick soul tosses, day and night the same,
Feeding on grief since laughter cannot please
Until she give the heart back whence it came
Unjust exchange! whereby my life's undone,
My true love hath two hearts and I not one.

II

Love is a sickness and a smart,
'Tis idly spoken:
He will not give me back my heart,
For it is broken.

O silly heart! to yield to Love
Yourself deceiving.
Your case can ne'er my pity move,
Since mine's the grieving.

Could I but hate who hateth me,
My freedom proving,
Since love is naught that I can see,
Or loved or loving.

III

My soul is full of bitter smart,
Our farewell spoken—
How many a fond and froward heart
Women have broken!

Like wanton tendrils of the vine
My grief is growing,
And dreams must mock this heart of mine
Now you are going.

But birds must leave their crystal spring
And suns their brightness—
With you, sweet, all my hope takes wing
And all my lightness.

IV

It ends tonight. All joy is hollow,
Fate takes the strong man in his mesh
And not the sun-god, even Apollo,
Could cure the canker in my flesh.

The whole wide sea of sorrow flowing
Brims all the harbours of my heart;
New pain on old for ever growing
Wakes to more woe the ancient smart.

Alas! 'tis truth the wise have spoken,
Wine has its lees and love can cloy,
And hearts too sorely tried are broken
And hollow all the hopes of joy.

THE FREE LOVER

They lie who say that love must be
A sickness and a misery;
He that ne'er loved woman knows
Never anything but woes.

I too love a woman; yet
My clear eyes are never wet;
Death has claimed me for his own,
Yet I live by love alone.

Clad in flesh and blood I move,
Though a swanwhite maid I love;
Though I love I eat and sleep,
Music's service still I keep.

I'm no reed in water swaying,
My free thought goes lightly playing;
I'm no lover chill through all
The piled cloaks of Donegal.

I'm a man like others still,
Fires burn me, waters chill;
If the young and strong must die,
Ne'er so doomed a man as I.

Rope will bind me, this know I,
Like a sponge my mouth's ne'er dry,
Softer is my flesh than stone,
I can't drink the sea alone.

Though love within my bones doth play,
I know the night is not the day,
Black's black, white's white, a boat's a boat
And not a stately ship afloat.

I never call a horse a crow,
The sea's no hill, that much I know,
Small is less than great I feel
And a fly smaller than a seal.

Though I love her more than all
The sun-ripened maids of Donegal,
Yet, by all the gods above!,
I'm no sufferer for her love.

THE WISE LOVER

We will not die, these lovers say,
For any eyes but eyes of blue;
No hair shall win our hearts away
But hair of golden hue.

It is not with me as with these,
And yet a wiser song I sing,
Whom a love-lighted eye can please
Black as the raven's wing.

I ask no roses in her face,
No golden shimmer in her hair;
A pallid cheek for me has grace
And jet-black locks are fair.

Dark was the mother of that maid
Who brought proud Ilion to its fall;
Yet shining locks of golden braid
Had Helen fair and tall.

Which was the lovelier of the two
—Red-lipped, sweet-voiced that winsome pair—
There was no man on earth that knew,
The dark one or the fair.

A tiny pearl men ring in gold
And little women I love well;
Of maids, hounds, horses from of old
Little are best, men tell.

I will confess to all around
That, since my heart to love inclined,
My worst sin is that I have found
All women to my mind.

For, be she little, 'tis no care,
Or be she tall, so love be fed;
A maiden young and straight and fair
Is fit for a king's bed.

There are whose skin as foam is bright,
Whose breasts are hills of stainless snow;
I love as well maids dusk as night
And girls of swarthy glow.

And be she sib to me, what care!
Or stranger from the isles of light;
A kindred maiden being fair
Claims love of double right.

Those witty women skilled to glose
Their cunning favours I let pass;
A woman's wise enough who knows
What's clover and what's grass.

Widow or virgin, love ne'er cloy,
All charm my heart and this is truth;
A fullblown love has riper joys,
But beauty dwells with youth.

Whether in church or hall they move
With stately grace or modest charms,
They are dear, but dearest when their love
Grows wanton in my arms.

No beauty's counter to my will
Save when it's old and wrinkled grown
—And some are young at forty still—
Let each man love his own.

AT PARTING

False love, since thou and I must sever,
Hear this, the swansong of my passion,
Let us be twain henceforth forever,
Let thy heart follow my heart's fashion.

If thou shalt hear men speak about me,
If low or high scorn or befriend me,
Then leave them thou to praise or flout me,
Neither revile me nor defend me.

And if in church or cell thou beest,
In field enclosed or open meadow,
Whate'er I see, whate'er thou seest,
Let's turn each from the other's shadow.

Speak not, and I will speak them never,
Love-names or names our fathers gave us;
Forget as I forget forever
How love with looking did enslave us.

THE PROUD LADY

How far apart are she and I!
I and the lady of my heart;
I yearn in love; she passes by
Too proud one kind word to impart.

For gold she left me here to moan,
Gold set her fragile thought astray;
But, came she in her shift alone,
I'd take her to my heart today.

How lightly on her spirit lies
The love that crushes my poor heart!
And, ah! she mocks my miseries.
How far are she and I apart!

LOVE'S BITTER-SWEET

Sweet is the pain
That lovers know,
Though never any
Hath told men so:
Love is, methinks, although it murders many,
The loveliest life God gives to men below.

The years in vain
Against him bring
Their archery :
Time has no sting
To wound his heart who loves. How should he die
Round whom a woman's arms their girdle fling?

Wide is his reign
That rules a heart :
There is no treasure,
No jewelled art
To win his eye, whose life swims in such pleasure
Whose love is paid with love in Love's own mart.

ODI ET AMO

Lo! I now hate that loved before,
And, lacking love, I cannot live.
If any after me adore,
To that crazed heart my curse I give.

Her gracious eye, her gold hair now,
Her voice — the bird's cry on the shore—
Her snowy teeth, her pencilled brow,
All these I hate that loved before.

Her crimson lips, her throat of snow,
Her hands, her speech— exhaustless store—
I would not that the people know,
And yet I hate that loved before.

Her name I will not hide away,
O, N, R, A, and one O more,
Read this my secret all who may,
For now I hate that loved before.

This woman pledged to me of old,
—Scarce one escapes scandal in five score—
I say, since truth must needs be told,
I hate her now that loved before.

BEWARE!

Lady! hearken. Say not now
All thy heart dares to avow.
By thy curls, that golden clan,
Never trust a jealous man.
Say no word, but pass me by,
Tarry and keep a watchful eye.
Come not nigh me, speak no word,
In his own hour love is heard.
Little sparks make mighty flame,
'Ware the watchers of thy fame.
Sit not nigh me, dear one, so.
Jealous eyes watch where you go.

Sit not nigh me. Swift away!
Hear you not what all men say.
They are spying everywhere
On that bared head and bright hair.
While they watch our converse thus
Whispered speech is not for us.
Though it seem a little thing,
Touched hands might our ruin bring.
Since I may not hope for grace
Or leave to woo that winsome face,
Ah! why wed that sour one when
You had the choice of Ireland's men.
Every day I follow you,
Yet no speech between us two.
Rippling hair that wrought me wrong,
Fate has bound us in a thong.
Long the day for you and me,
Speech is bond if thought is free.
Thou whose ringlets curl and flow,
Life shall not be alway so.
On your lips a finger lay,
Doubt not love will find a way.
Hide thy captive heart from light
Like a robber in the night.
All the long day smiling be
Like a woman womanly.
Hard it is, yet silence feign
And, chief, that truant eye restrain.

HE PRAISES HIS WIFE WHEN SHE
HAD GONE FROM HIM.

White hands of languorous grace,
Fair feet of stately pace
And snowy-shining knees—
My love was made of these.

Stars glimmered in her hair,
Slim was she, satin-fair;
Dark like seal's fur her brows
Shadowed her cheek's fresh rose.

What words can match its worth,
That beauty closed in earth,
That courteous, stately air
Winsome and shy and fair.

To have known all this and be
Tortured with memory
—Curse on this waking breath—
Makes me in love with death.

Better to sleep than see
This house now dark to me
A lonely shell in place
Of that unrivalled grace.

TWO WAYS OF JEALOUSY

I

Thy wife is light, thou sayest. Well!
Then heed not thou. This comes to all
And not alone thou walkest Hell,
Such rains on just and unjust fall.

How can she else? A woman she.
She heeds not now the cost and pain;
Love's hired servant must she be
And nevermore her own again.

Be wise in time and seeing see not,
Believe not half thy palsied fears;
Of proven things swear that they be not
And hearing hear not with thine ears.

Fond eunuch, go the way she's led thee
And nothing in the sun's eye see:
This the true wisdom shall bestead thee:
A blind and witless idiot be.

So eat thy fill and soundly sleep,
Hide from her eyes thy torturing fire;
Take the two puddles at one leap
And fan the flames of her desire.

Whate'er she do, thou lov'st her still, such is thy
jealous passion

So fan thy wanton wife's desire in the true wittol's
fashion.

But, if this thing thou can'st not do and honour still
dost cherish,

Then like a madman fly away and like a madman
perish.

II

O thou suspicion-mad!

'Tis an odd tale to hear;

No marvel thou art sad,

Yet there's no cause for fear.

A shapeless, grumbling wife

All wise men leave alone;

'Tis strange, but on my life!

Thy wife is still thine own.

Such cunning care as this

Her chastity to shield

Guards beauty where none is:

A fence without a field!

One in a hundred here

Leads safe as thou his life;

Thou hast no cause to fear

Tongues scandalling thy wife.

Though all the world should come
To swear her life is bad,
Abide thou safe at home,
O thou suspicion-mad!

DIARMUID RUADH PRAISES BEAUTY.

I

THE LOVELY LADY

Sweet Jesu!, was't to prove thy power or was it in
repentance

For all the sorrows of the Gael under thy heavy
sentence

That for the salving of their wounds thou sentest
down from Heaven

This lightsome lady lovelier than the bright Pleiads
seven?

For those rich tresses curl by curl gleam with a
pearl-bright shimmer

And tremble still meandering down to where her
white feet glimmer,

And there arrived they take no rest but turn and
lightly springing

They soar towards her head again like birdflocks
upward winging.

And there her bright brows palely shine beneath
that golden border

Where sunrays strive with liliated hues in strange and
sweet disorder

And to that lovely lady's cheeks they lend a comely
brightness

While the blood coursing neath her skin contends
to flush their whiteness.

A magnet, sure, has touched her eyes, those keen
and crystal lances,

For kingliest heroes fall a prey to their resistless
glances,

And, though those veiled orbs seek the ground, 'tis
only to dissemble,

A thousand hapless captive souls caught in their
meshes tremble.

Her lips are sweet as honeycomb, crimson and fine
and slender,

They close about her little teeth that gleam with
pearly splendour;

And when they ope there issues forth a lightsome
speech unbroken

As when touched lute strings stir and tell their mel-
odies unspoken.

Her neck is whiter than the swan that in the golden weather
Bathes in the foam of breaking waves her bright and
downy feather;
There's nought to add or take away; 'tis perfect in
its making,
For Christ's self wrought it straight and fair when
she to life was waking.

Her sweet round breasts are virgin still, for no rude
hand has smutched them,
Like whitest eggshells newly-laid that lie where
none has touched them;
Her chaste and comely form is bright as may when
spring winds fan it
So slim, a baby's tiny hand, it seems, would all but
span it.

All fever-wasted folk that long have lain in sorrow
stricken
Till all their wits have gone astray in gloom no hope
could quicken,
When cunning leeches all despair to heal their constant
sadness,
My lovely lady passing by dispels the cloud of madness.

II

THE SONG OF THIEVERY.

Fair lady with the straight-ruled brows of strict
and subtle weaving,

If thievery be counted crime and all that goes with
thieving,

Methinks, thou comely countenance!, 'tis likely
thou wilt languish

For all thy plundered loveliness chained and con-
demned to anguish.

For, by my cloak, that golden hair with great eyes
shining under,

So soft and long and curled and close, I swear it is
but plunder;

If I have leave to speak the truth, that hair where-
with you queen it

Wrapped round the shaft of Cupid's darts erstwhile
mine eyes have seen it.

And O! what theft was that in thee, thou sweetlip-
ped maid and sunny,

To rob the busy garden bees of their flower-gather-
ed honey,

And then to set it in thy lips that I might sin with
longing

To taste the swarm of kisses sweet in that rich
garner thronging.

'Twas evil done to rob the bees, but worse remains
behind it,
The charge of stolen stones of price proven the
judge must find it;
The Ethiopian sought them out and ranged them
in a cluster,
Thou stol'st and set them in thy mouth to lend thy
lips their lustre.

Though all thy words are melodies in music softly
flowering
And all men hang upon thy lips to hear those sweet
songs showering,
I know not whence thou hast that spoil, what land
of song thou'st raided,
Unless for lutes of English make that land thou
hast invaded.

There's sorrow on the swan today unless thy spoil
thou render,
For thou hast ta'en her snowy robe and all her
downy splendour;
And O! the lily weeps to see her clear and sunny
whiteness
Spread over those twin cheeks of thine in their un-
rivalled brightness.

Like the heaped winter snow that lies the Alpine
mountains over
Twin breasts on that fair bosom swell and burst
their jealous cover,
And all that sweet flesh over which thy sheltering
robes are ranged
The bright-skinned Daphne had it once ere she to
laurel changed.

But, all alas! amid those spoils each with the other
vying
I saw my murdered broken heart, a hapless blood-
clot, lying;
And yet it was no grief to him to count among
their number,
Though night and day he tosses there unvisited of
slumber.

Ah! lady, be not found in sin, if thou would'st be
forgiven
But yield up every stolen thing or e'er thou forfeit'st
Heaven;
Yet if in unrepentant mood thou yieldest not thy
winnings,
Then I forgive that crime in thee and all those love-
ly sinnings.

THE CURSE

(Here is a poem made by a farmer of Fingal abusing his nag because it threw him into a deep dirty pool just in front of the girl he was going to court).

You brindled beast through whom I've lost her!
Out of my sight! the devil take you!
And, 'pon my soul! this is no jest,
This year I'll rest not till I break you.

Satanic Ananias blast you!
Is that the way you learned to carry?
Your master in the mud to hurl
Before the girl he meant to marry.

The everlasting nightfiend ride you!
My curse cling closer than your saddle!
Hell's ravens pick your eyes like eggs!
You scarecrow with your legs astraddle!

And it was only yesterday too
I gave the stable-boy a shilling
To stuff your belly full of hay
For fear you'd play this trick, you villain!

I gave you oats, you thankless devil!
And saved your life, you graceless fiend, you!
From ragged mane to scrubby tail
I combed and brushed and scraped and cleaned you.

You brute! the devil scorch and burn you!
You had a decent mare for mother,
And many a pound I've spent on hay
To feed you one day and another.

The best of reins, the finest saddle,
Good crupper and good pad together,
Stout hempen girth — for these I've paid
And breastplate made of Spanish leather.

What's the excuse? What blindness caused it?
That bias in your indirections
That made a windmill of your legs
And lost for good my Meg's affections.

With my left spur I'll slash and stab you
And run it through the heart within you
And with the right I'll take great lumps
Out of your rumps until I skin you.

If ever again I go a-courting
Across your back — may Hellfire melt you!—
Then may I split my fork in twain
And lose the girl again as well too!

SHEILA

That fresh face and tumbled hair
Light my melancholy mood,
Though the people cry: Beware!
Wooing her you get no good.

Lose or win her, what care I?
Loveliness must needs be wooed,
Though the jealous people cry,
Though of her I get no good.

Though I get no good and woes
Dog my footsteps everywhere
Till about my pillow flows
All that golden flood of hair.

'Tis Sheila's back that puts the bards to rout
And her cold shoulder throws their music out;
I rush through madness to my soul's undoing
And yet I get no good of all my wooing.

THE HONEY THIEF

Thou loveliest of all maids alive!
Sweet robber of the wild bees' hive,
'Tis evil done, if thou art sane,
To make God's ordinances vain.

The Baptist had one meal a day,
The everlasting scriptures say;
In the Judean desert there
Honey and locusts was his fare.

From dairy, hive or church to thief
Is sin no penance can relieve;
Sweet trickster! Heaven's honey eat
And rob no more that holy meat.

Though in thy lovely shining cheek the rose and
lily vie
And by the sweetness of thy lips great warriors cap-
tured lie,
Thou harriest now the harmless bees, but one day
thou shalt die
And a thousand bees on Judgment Day will hunt
thee through the sky.

THE COTTER'S LIFE

A cotter's life is hard. Who asks
To live that life has little wit.
For 'tis the worst of earthly tasks
To make a decent life of it.

With every rising dawn he sees
That all good things he must discard;
Hopeless he looks and finds no ease,
A cotter's life is bitter hard.

A skimpy grumbling idle wife
And many a sullen screaming brat
Ragged and foodless all their life:
A pleasant company is that!

This life has left me poor and worn and robbed me
of my rest
And turned my stricken heart to fire and ashes in
my breast,
And I that went so proudly once and laughed the
world away
I curse myself and all my kind in misery today.

THE WIDOW

He's dead and longer mourn him not
Since sorrow is the common lot;
We've heard thy tears of perfect moan,
So wed before thy beauty's gone.

Thou'rt not the only widowed fair,
So bless him once and leave him there.
Thy weeping will not bring him back,
He's dead. And men thou dost not lack.

Thou'st had— and counted small disgrace—
Much close play in a secret place.
Thou sorrowest for thy spouse, but he
Knew other women beside thee.

O lady that sheddest salt tears in a copious flow!
Cease wasting thy beauty, the truth of thy sorrow
we know.
Other women are widows, thou art not the first or
the last;
And, maybe, a new lover shall come e'er the
month's end be past.

FOUR EPIGRAMS.

I

AT MASS

Ah! light lovely lady with delicate lips aglow,
With breast more white than a branch heavy-laden
with snow,
When my hand was uplifted at Mass to salute the
Host
I looked at you once, and the half of my soul was
lost.

II

SCANDAL

Snowbreasted star whose shining eyes are bold,
With ivory-gleaming teeth and locks of gold,
Mock not a sister fair who steers awry
Till thine own vessel in safe harbour lie.

III

REPENT

Ah! golden girl so sweetly spoken
Let it not be charged on thee:
"She a Christian's heart has broken".
Repent and let love's fire burn free.

IV

A VISION OF THE NIGHT

O chaste and fair! O sweet and rare! O slave of love
and duty!

Whose clustering hair falls stair by stair down all
thy house of beauty,

Thy shadow bright at dark of night went by where
I was sleeping,

Thy form, thy face, thy peerless grace in slow pro-
cession sweeping.

COLOPHON

“Finis” to all the manuscripts I’ve penned

And to life’s fitful fever here “The End”;

“The End” to limewhite women golden-tressed,

And in God’s hands at Judgment be the rest.

Here ends 'Loves Bitter-Sweet': Translations from the Irish Poets of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, by Robin Flower. Five hundred copies of this book have been printed on paper made in Ireland, and published by Elizabeth Corbet Yeats at the Cuala Press, 133 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin, Ireland. Finished on the last day of October 1925.

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